



Living in Government Supplied Tents,
1938. Horace Bristol (American,
1908–1997). Gelatin silver print, 19.1
x 22.9 cm (7 ½ x 9 in.). 2000.22.8
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Also on View

About Life: The Photographs of Dorothea Lange

October 15, 2002–February 9, 2003

Dorothea Lange (American, 1895–1965) launched her photographic career upon her arrival in San Francisco in 1918. During the Great Depression, when the unemployed were on city streets and dust bowl refugees were on the highways, she documented the new realities of American life. *About Life* presents some of her 1930s work for the Farm Security Administration along with earlier work from the Southwest, post–World War II pictures made for *Life*, images from her later travels in Asia, and photographs she made at home in Berkeley. Selected primarily from the Getty's permanent collection, the exhibition spans Lange's career from the 1920s to the 1960s.

Statewide Reading Program

"California Stories: Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*" encourages Californians to read and discuss John Steinbeck's classic novel during October 2002. The program is sponsored by the California Council for the Humanities in partnership with the California Center for the Book. For related events visit www.californiastories.org.

The J. Paul Getty Museum

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Front cover *Migrant Camp, near Visalia, Tulare County, California,*
1938. Horace Bristol (American, 1908–1997). Gelatin silver print, 24.1
x 19.1 cm (9 x 7 ½ in.). 2000.22.12 © Horace Bristol/Courtesy of
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the Grapes of Wrath

Horace Bristol's California Photographs

OCT. 15, 2002–FEB. 9, 2003

Horace Bristol

(American, 1908–1997), born into a family of California journalists, began his career as a photojournalist in San Francisco in the early 1930s. He received his first free-lance assignments from *Sunset* and *Time* magazines, but it wasn't until he became a staff photographer for *Life* magazine in 1937 that he began to create his most memorable photographs.

In 1933 Bristol set up a studio in San Francisco and became friends with many of the photographers living in Northern California, including Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, and Edward Weston. He was most influenced by Lange's spontaneous and humanistic approach, and like her, Bristol favored smaller, handheld cameras and close contact with his subjects. In 1937, inspired by Lange's work for the Farm Security Administration and by Margaret Bourke-White's book on Southern poverty, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), Bristol embarked on a project to document the migrant worker camps in California. While he pitched the concept to *Life* and *Fortune* magazines, Bristol thought the subject had potential as a book, and he proposed a collaboration with the writer John Steinbeck. Although Bristol had never met Steinbeck, he was impressed by his work, particularly *In Dubious Battle* (1936), a novel that expressed the author's sympathy for organized labor. In the winter of 1937–38, they visited California migrant camps together and documented what they saw.

Bristol and Steinbeck were both eyewitnesses to the harsh living conditions of those camps in the San Joaquin Valley. The photographer and writer translated their shared experiences into their respective mediums. Although Bristol's planned photographic book was never realized, the images he made were used as reference material while casting and costuming the film adaptation of Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). After the film had gained popularity, Bristol's images were published in two articles in *Life*. *Living in Government Supplied Tents* (back cover) appeared in both articles. This photograph, with its muddy foreground, grimy tents, and cloudy sky, conveys the desolate surroundings of a camp in Visalia. Intense rains had created flooding and sanitation problems that the camps were ill equipped to handle. The young woman in the doorway of the tent is smiling, but the mud and trash surrounding her indicate her difficult living conditions.

Bristol continued to work as a photojournalist—even documenting United States naval aviation campaigns during World War II with Edward Steichen—until 1967, when he relocated his family to Mexico and took up a second career as an architect. After retiring to Ojai, California, in 1976, Bristol reconsidered his early career. He renamed his 1937–38 photographs of migrant camps and titled the



Nursing Mother in Camp, 1938. Horace Bristol (American, 1908–1997). Gelatin silver print, 33 x 25.4 cm (13 x 10 in.). 2000.22.17.1 © Horace Bristol/Courtesy of Corbis Corporation

series *The Grapes of Wrath* to identify them with Steinbeck's novel. An example of this is *Migrant Camp, near Visalia, Tulare County, California* (cover), which Bristol retitled *Tom Joad Chopping Wood*.

Bristol's approach to his subject is both factual and sympathetic. He not only captured details of camp life, such as the tents and the meager possessions of the migrants, but he also illustrated the immense physical labor required to secure basic needs like firewood. Bristol documented "Tom Joad's" hardship while preserving his dignity. Similarly, in the 1938 photograph *Nursing Mother in Camp* (left), reminiscent of Dorothea Lange's 1936 *Migrant Mother*, *Nipomo, California*, Bristol captured the humanity of a young mother by focusing on her

connection to both her child and the man sitting behind her. Bristol emphasized the woman's thoughtful bearing amid the impoverished conditions.

While only a portion of Bristol's images were eventually published in *Life* and *Fortune* magazines, this photographic series remains a striking visual document of California during the Great Depression. Recalling the trips that he and Steinbeck made, Bristol said: "Emotionally it was not easy for either of us to leave the comfort of our heated motel room, then, after having a generous country breakfast, drive to the rain-soaked camp and photograph or interview shivering men and women with empty bellies and hunger in their eyes. That's where the food in my station wagon came in. It helped salve our consciences, although it never went far enough."

—Lisa Henry
Department of Photographs